

The Jedi Warrior Bond - - Sanctuary

by GM

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JEDI WARRIOR BOND

**

PART3

**_

-- SANCTUARY --

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by

GM

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Part three in the six part Jedi Warrior Bond series. Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-Wan are negotiators on a volatile planet holding a mystic sanctuary. Mortal danger brings them to new levels of their Warrior Bond.

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Rated -- PG -- intensity, violence, hurt/comfort -- ANGST --
plot-lite

Comments -- send to:mfuff@crosswinds.net

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Not connected with the JA series.

The Canon according to Lucas -- based on the universe provided in the movie Star Wars: The Phantom Menace. All characters copyrights and legal details belong to George Lucas -- the highest Master Jedi of all.

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ORDER OF STORIES IN THE _JEDI WARRIOR BOND_ SERIES:

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. . . every saga has a beginning . . .

Secrets

The Path of Bonding

Connecting

Sanctuary

The Heart of Existence

Edges of Darkness

The Sorcerer and the Apprentice

Shadow on the Warrior Path

Bridge Over Troubled Water

Always

The Last Hope

The End of the Warrior Path

* * *

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Gritting his teeth to suppress a yawn, Obi-Wan Kenobi smothered his mouth with his hand and looked down at the floor, blinking. It was not much effort for the young Jedi to conceal his fatigue and boredom. When his stomach growled it took a bit more effort to screen that from the other members of the audience. Glancing around to those important personages sitting nearest him, he breathed a sign of relief. No one had heard him.

Four seats down, his Master, Qui-Gon Jinn sent him a sideways, amused glance. The great Jedi Master had not _"heard" _the rumble, but undoubtedly _"felt"_ it from the potent Force-connection established between them. Now well into their fourth year as Master and Padawan, their relationship was more strong, comfortable and formidable than most Jedi partnerships. Through the stress and dangers of their various missions they had turned to their mighty and bold powers of the Force -- blending them and melding them to become an incredibly effective unit.

No question there was still much for Obi-Wan to learn. Now sixteen, he had periods of confidence that he had learned nearly all his Master could teach him. Then, through some blunder or oversight, he would be rocked back to reality and receive a flicker of understanding that he may never -- in his lifetime -- reach the wisdom and Force-vigor of the legendary Jinn.

Jinn's lip twitched, his deep blue eyes sparking with humor. At times those compelling eyes could flash with incredible intensity as dangerous as Obi-Wan's lightsabre. Abstractly, he wondered if he had chosen the azure power crystal for his lightsabre to match his Master's sabre-like eyes? In the beginning months of their relationship those stern eyes had flashed at him with ominous fervor. Once they accepted and refined their Warrior Bond, the spark in those eyes had been more in amusement than irritation. Although Jinn would always present a patrician, dignified, even heroic image to strangers, Master Jinn was a warm, even humorous Jedi. Just like his personality, his complex nature had as many facets as a power crystal.

Jinn caught the eyes of Kenobi. Without having to resort to thought-projection Qui-Gon sent a clear message. Easily received by a Padawan now proficient at understanding his Master's thoughts more by senses and feelings rather than actual telepathic messages. This time, Qui-Gon clearly agreed that the tedious talks were growing more insufferable by the minute since they should have concluded for supper three hours before. Still, Obi-Wan needed to control his stomach!

Obi-Wan answered with a silent, imperceptible shrug, telling his Master that it was not his fault. He was still a growing young man and needed his food!

The Malastare negotiator pounded his fist on the table, startling Kenobi into a higher level of attention. Thoughts drifting back to the business at hand, he didn't have to have much talent with sensitivity to feel the animosity and anger bubbling around the room.

Malastare had colonized an outer planet named Kreeg centuries before. The planet was in the Kkorgar system, but the Kkorgar economy could not support expansion at that time. Now Kkorgar needed to colonize the habitable planet because of overpopulation and Malastare wasn't going to give it up. Since both governments were important members of the Galactic Republic, the Chancellor of the Senate himself had asked for Qui-Gon Jinn as a negotiator in the dispute.

Across the table sat Jedi Master Phona Byl and her Padawan Phona Dar, both Altarans with nearly translucent, blue skin and wide, bulbous heads with huge, slanted eyes. The other Jedi team were negotiating

in behalf of the Kkorgar delegation. In the interests of neutrality there was little contact between the Jedi contingents. Which suited Obi-Wan just fine. He found it tedious trying to mingle with Alterans, who were a cool, distant race and didn't socialize much. Of course, some outsiders might say the same about his own Master and they could not be more incorrect.

To the casual observer, Qui-Gon Jinn seemed a noble, reserved, even severe individual. The reticence increased his image as a dignified and mighty representative of the Force. A new style for his light-brown hair -- braids pulled back and twisting into a long single braid at the back of his neck -- enhanced his image of severity. For a long time Jinn had held that image in his apprentice's eyes and mind. Until a few years before when Jinn and Kenobi finally established the extraordinary bond that linked them through the Force. To those around them the two Jedi projected a reserved, detached front. Between them there was a deep, powerful link that was unusual even in Jedi ranks. In their minds they labeled it their Warrior Bond.

On more than one occasion the Bond had saved either or both lives. During intense and tedious negotiations, such as these, the secret unity was an excellent way to exchange thoughts or impressions without alerting any one else around them. Even the Jedi Council did not appreciate the profound depth of their connection and they intended to keep it that way.

The young Kenobi found it amusing that his Master was considered aloof and cool. Obi-Wan's reputation seemed to be one of sober, determined, even brooding. A far cry from his initiate days at the Jedi Temple. Then, he was a different person now. Risk was something no longer abstract and exciting. Danger was now a menace that could rob him of his mentor in the blink of an eye. In the years of their partnership he had learned much, the foremost being anxiety for his Master.

So for two days Obi-Wan had acted as Jinn's assistant, sounding board and part-time pupil in the matter. To a sixteen-year-old there was nothing more boring than these mediations, but it was his duty. Someday he would be the Knight or Master working for peace and now he had the opportunity to learn from the best.

Glancing at his master, Obi-Wan hoped that day of independence would never come. Sometimes he longed for the autonomy afforded Jedi Knights. Most days his maturity level was high enough to know he had so much more to learn and the best possible teacher to learn from. Jinn should go to the Council when Obi-Wan became a knight -- in many years -- and both promotions would be deserved, but met with poignant acceptance. Even after he ended his apprenticeship he hoped to have many years of happy friendship with (Council-member) Jinn. Young Kenobi could not imagine life without his Master -- mentor -- best friend. Qui-Gon had lost his Master in the Hyperspace Wars, but a few years after Jinn was a Knight, and the regret of the loss still echoed in Jinn's being. Kenobi did not want to lose his Master ever.

The Malastare representative flailed his arms around, his three eyes evilly scanning the fifteen others in the room. Feeling someone staring at him, Obi-Wan flicked at look across at the Malastare assistant. She had been flirting with him for two days and Obi-Wan

intently studied the data-pad in front of him -- anything rather than acknowledge her attention.

Jedi codes of conduct were extremely strict and they covered social interaction with heavy rules. For him to become involved with someone during a mission would compromise him and those he was committed to serve. A very convenient rule in most cases. A few times -- as a young man -- he felt cheated out of some prime opportunities, but those were rare. Often, like this mission, he was saved from embarrassing rejections because he could fall back on and blame the regulations.

Most beings around the galaxy respected, even revered, the Jedi order. They were given great acclaim and could be rich and powerful in material means if they so chose -- although it was against the code to accept any reward for their service. Their utilization of the Force, their mystic codes, their respect also lent them exotic, romantic appeal. Offers for much more than material gains were given to Jedi and declined -- sometimes reluctantly -- but still declined.

Besides, as a personal rule he never dated outside his species. And never a being with three eyes!

The Malastare representative looked about to come to blows with a Kkorgar assistant near Kenobi. Jedi Master Phona Byl spoke in a trilly, sharp tone, but was ignored. Animosity around the room escalated. Jinn came to his feet. Like a hot blade in his mind and heart, Obi-Wan perceived a searing shaft of hatred -- murderous malicious intent to kill -- directed at Master Jinn.

Gulping in air, his heart slamming against his chest, he scanned the room. Many were guarded, which was suspicious in itself. As Qui-Gon uttered even, calm advice, Obi-Wan shuddered as the lingering waves of dread receded. Calmly, forcing himself to show no outward change, he used the Force to test those around him. As expected, the level of anger was too high -- he failed to get a specific reading on anyone. All he knew was that one of the thirteen other beings in this room with them wanted to kill his Master.

For entirely different reasons than before, Obi-Wan now awaited the end of the meeting with tense anticipation. Only a few moments later the leaders of the opposition and Jinn agreed to start the negotiations again in the morning. The close-mindedness was not going to be eroded away on empty stomachs and tired, strained nerves. He wondered if he should ask Master Phona Byl or Padawan Phona Dar if they felt the sharp threat. They were forbidden to consult with the other Jedi. Speaking to them would just escalate the tense situation.

Walking through the chancellery of Kreeg, Kenobi had no interest in the elegant trappings. Kreeg had prospered and Malastare was quite proud of the thriving planet. Their maze gardens were renowned, their ancient temple legendary, their technology high. Although few places in the galaxy could rival the ostentatious elegance of the fabled Alderaan or Naboo, Kreeg did very well in the luxury department. A short path through tree lined gardens brought Jinn and Kenobi to the guest housing -- a multi-level apartment complex housing the most important visitors of the government. Malastare, Kreeg and Kkorgar representatives all quartered here, along with the Jedi.

Beyond the guest quarters was the most famous edifice in Kreeg, the Otoba Sanctuary. Sacred stones from Malastare lined the basement floor of the temple; with different sized vertical stones wedged into place to form a tri-level pyramid structure. The Otoba stones were rumored to have mystical powers -- something the Jedi could appreciate --and were intrigued to learn more about.

Experiencing their own adventures with mystical powers -- such as the Force -- they had moved on to a different level of supernatural with their Warrior Bond. Although Qui-Gon still hesitated to give their unique and profound connection such an exotic title, Obi-Wan had, since their first year, considered them linked in a Warrior Bond. Non-specifically defined by ancient Jedi, the Warrior Bond was a deep and abiding connection between Master and Padawan -- a unity of mind and spirit that transcended normal communications of the Force that was almost required between Jedi teachers and pupils. Just after their first year together (JEDI WARRIOR BOND #1, #2) they had cause to experience this in a traumatic, perilous experience.

Slowly over the last three years they worked on extending their understanding of the bond. They could easily communicate at any time on a telepathic and empathetic level. As the years brought them more in tune with each other and the Force, they developed a oneness in movement while fighting, of anticipation in any situation, of shared danger. Their perfect interaction had saved their lives more than once, but neither was anxious to test the bond too much since it was strongest in those periods of greatest personal peril.

Tobi, an aide to the Kreeg High Senator, stopped them. "Will you find time to visit the sanctuary tonight, Jedi?"

"Perhaps." Jinn was smoothly noncommittal.

"It is something you won't want to miss. Our most sacred edifice. The Malastare ambassador and his assistant have requested I organize a tour for tonight. They would like you to be their guests. Do you think that would help the negotiations?"

Jinn frowned. "Amicable contact outside the negotiation sessions is always good, Honorable Tobi. Please keep us informed." Glancing briefly at his apprentice, Qui-Gon then studied the towering pyramid beyond the newer buildings. "This sanctuary holds some -- interest -- for us."

After the stress of the negotiations, the Jedi hoped to visit the sacred sanctuary. At the rate of current mediation that would not be anytime soon. Not quite to the guest apartments, Qui-Gon stopped, just barely before Obi-Wan's sense of hazard prickled on his skin. Both looked to the large, ornate gates closing off the diplomatic area to the general public. A large crowd of Kreegs were gathered at the gates, shouting and ranting at the diplomats.

Everyone but the Jedi increased their pace into the safety of the apartments. For a moment Qui-Gon studied the crowd, then looked around him. Obi-Wan fought off a chill. His Master gave him a curt nod. Both had unmistakably felt the same sense of evil ripple through their perceptions.

Jinn cast frequent, curious glances at his student, obviously picking

up on the Padawan's heightened anxiety. Once inside their private quarters, Obi-Wan hardly closed the door before grabbing his Master by the arm and pushing him to the center of the room.

"Master, someone is going to kill you!" It was an urgent whisper, the tight, trembling voice clearly articulating the alarm.

Startled, Qui-Gon passively studied him for a moment. Blue eyes alight with concern, then amusement, then tolerance, he took a breath. "Why are you whispering, Padawan?" Voice low, he glanced at the door, now far away. "Are you afraid there are spies behind every corner?"

"This is serious, Master! You felt it while we were on the path to the housing!"

"I felt some sense of Darkness, yes, Obi-Wan, but I could hardly define it as a personal threat to my life specifically."

A chime at the door sounded and Obi-Wan jumped. Even Jinn was a bit surprised. Smoldering his amusement, the Master walked over, Padawan literally at his shoulder as they stood by the door, Obi-Wan protectively pushing the much taller, broader adult away to keep him from being directly in front of the door.

"Yes, who is it?" Kenobi demanded sharply, his hand touching the lightsabre hilt at his belt.

"Kelnor," came an old, tenuous voice. "I bring your dinners, honored Jedi."

Kelnor was the servant assigned to supply their every need. Treated as the highest possible dignitaries on most planets, the Jedi on Kreeg enjoyed sumptuous food -- and plenty of it -- luxurious suites with sitting parlors, communications centers and the softest bed Obi-Wan had ever had the privilege of sleeping in. Meals were provided without request, snacks appeared without summons and Kelnor, with deliver extra bowls of treats, appeared just before bedtime to make sure that all was right with the honored guests.

"Wait!" Kenobi glanced at his Master. "Do you think we should let him in?"

Jinn bit his lip. "Only if you wish to eat, Obi-Wan. And I believe that is one of your strongest desires is it not?"

Accepting the teasing, Kenobi smirked. "You know me well, Master. And my stomach. But do you really think it safe?"

"Yes, I do. I think it highly unlikely anyone will be trying to poison us, my Padawan. Allow the man to enter."

Still wary, Obi-Wan did as he was bid and opened the door. Kelnor entered with a gravitray replete with plates and bowls overflowing with food.

Placing the meal on the table he asked if there was anything else he could do. "I can help you with any entertainment's you might need." The tone suggestive and obvious as to his meaning.

Obi-Wan sighed with irritation. The servant would not linger if Qui-Gon did not insist on adopting beings that seemed out of place in their own world. His Master's compassion was legendary and sometimes tedious. Denying needing anything else, Jinn kindly dismissed him. Kenobi studied the food items and aloud wondered if he should test them for poison.

Still beaming with merriment, Qui-Gon gestured to his platter. "Are you volunteering to be my taster?"

Irrked, Obi-Wan glared at his mentor. "This is serious, Master, it is no joke. Someone wants to kill you."

Sighing, Qui-Gon took him by the shoulders and directed him to a chair at the table. "Why don't we take the risk and eat while you tell me what is going on."

Platters filled with grilled quarnia filets -- sprinkled with grilled, slivered pinoi nuts -- were garnished with cold fruits and served with chilled tea to drink. Two side bowls with raw pinoi nuts testified to the popularity of Kreeg's most well known food. The nuts were crunchy morsels spurting out an initially tart flavor, immediately followed by a sweet tang. Too complex for Obi-Wan's taste, but typically, his convoluted and multi-faceted Master loved the snack. Kelnor kept the apartments well stocked with the treat.

Obi-Wan related his reception of the flashed threat during the negotiation session. No doubt it was directed at the senior Jedi when Jinn stood to speak. Gratified that the news sobered his Master, he pointed out there were thirteen suspects and he had, unfortunately, failed to discern the culprit through the Force.

"I am sorry I failed you in that, Master, but I promise I will find out who it is and stop them."

In the past few years more than adulations and acceptance met the ten thousand Jedi in service to the Republic. Twenty-two Jedi Knights, three Jedi Masters and nine Padawan Jedi had been murdered -- considered out and out assassinations -- while performing their duties throughout the galaxy. This number exceeded the usual handful of Jedi who died every year from accident, old age or malice.

A tide of danger and rebellion was surfacing in the Republic. More and more systems were dissenting; more outlaw worlds broke away from the rigid rules of the Republic and refused to recognize the authority of the Jedi order. These were perilous times and Obi-Wan took his job of protection of his Master very seriously. They had been through some tight spots in their partnership and he wanted to keep their team working for many years to come.

His expression grave, Jinn managed a sympathetic glance at his pupil. "There is no need for apology. You picked up on a very vital impression that completely eluded me."

"You were occupied with much more than I."

"Nevertheless, you grasped the threat amidst a room full of volatile emotions. For that I must thank you, as well as congratulate you."

Despite the grave matter, Obi-Wan glowed from the praise. "Thank you, Master. I just pray it will be of use."

"Fore warned is fore armed, my Padawan."

As usual, Obi-Wan finished with his main course ahead of his companion, then stabbed at the fruit with the long narrow skewers popular on Kreeg as the main eating utensil. Pushing aside his plate Qui-Gon dipped a hefty fist into the bowl of nuts and munched. Both Jedi burned a lot of energy and could put away a goodly amount of food.

"Most involved in the negotiations dislike us, but who is angry enough to kill you? Everyone is volatile about the matter, all three parties have a lot to lose. "

Qui-Gon crunched on the nuts and ruminated. "Well put. Perhaps it would help to have a bit of personal attention with the suspects."

Eyes widening, Obi-Wan nearly choked. "Interview them individually?" He gulped. "As long as it's not the Malastare assistant. Not alone, please, Master."

Nearly choking on the nuts, Qui-Gon took a drink of tea to clear his throat. Still laughing, he shook his head. "I would not subject you to that, Padawan. I have picked up her -- uh -- interest -- in you on several occasions during the conference." Clearing his throat again he drained the glass of tea. "Sometimes the assistants and negotiators meet in the gardens for drinks before bedtime. That would be a good opportunity, don't you think?"

"Perfect." New doubts surfaced as he pondered the complexities before them. "But how is it that I couldn't specifically detect the instigator of the threat? Could he have some power -- telepathic blocking -- sensitivity blocking -- that we don't know about or can't discern?"

Brows furrowed in thought, Qui-Gon shrugged. "A shrewd question. We shall consider that before we go to the gardens."

"Will we still have time to spar in the exercise rooms?"

"Of course." The lightsabre practice had become a necessary stress release as well as their usual method to keep in shape. They were able to keep in top condition and work out their frustrations in the nightly routine. "I look forward to thrashing at some imaginary negotiators with great zeal this evening."

Lifting his eyebrows -- diverted by the sarcastic comment -- Obi-Wan's natural irony surfaced. "Ah, the true nature of the Jedi Master emerges. Adept mediator by day, ruthless warrior by night."

Qui-Gon shivered just an instant before Kenobi shook from a tremor in the Force. Exchanging glances they acknowledged the mutual alarm, then looked at the window. Briskly crossing the room, they could see the crowd by the gates had grown violent and were surging against the locked metal, chanting and screaming for justice from the

diplomats.

Pounding at the door made both of them jump and before they could reach the door it burst in, the Kreeg diplomatic representative Tobi, breathless and terrified, his three eyes darting about wildly. "Come! They are going to attack us! You must save us, Jedi!"

"Your own people?" Qui-Gon's tone was calm, even serene, as if there was no danger at all.

From their heightened connection, Kenobi knew that the peacefulness was a façade. Inside the Master was tense with wary suspicion of the people outside as well as this diplomat. Through his Master's advanced level of the Force the apprentice could feel the danger all around them.

"They think we have failed them, that we will let them be returned to Kkorgar. They are out to kill us!"

The doorway suddenly filled with the representatives from Malastare and Kkorgar. All talked at once, jamming into the room, pushing the Jedi aside. All pleaded for help or protection. Jedi Master Phona Byl and her Padawan Phona Dar arrived with the Kkorgar diplomats. Briefly, quietly the Masters consulted, then Jinn and Phona Byl tried to bring calm to the gathering. Tobi, the aide to the Kreeg High Senator reported that all diplomats must go to the top level of the Otoba Sanctuary. A sacred edifice, everyone would be safe there.

Before leaving, Master Jinn consulted with the other Jedi. "There is great fear here, but I sense something darker -- deeper."

"Yes." Phona Byl thinly agreed in her sibilant tone. "Great danger. Gather in your Force power." She and her Padawan stepped over to consult with the Kkorgar ambassador.

Jinn leaned close to his apprentice and whispered, "Stay alert, Obi-Wan, there is an edge of Dark energy that is beyond the civil disturbance. Something" he sighed and shook his head. "Familiar."

The deep blue eyes were troubled and Kenobi's nerves shivered with foreboding.

Ready to leave, the aide led the way with Qui-Gon a close second. Phona Byl, Phona Dar and Obi-Wan waited until all diplomats were accounted for, then fell in at the rear. Seventeen beings in all, including Kelnor the servant, rushed across the compound toward the garden maze that fronted the entrance to the sacred pyramid. In ancient times it was rumored mighty shamans conducted rites of sacrifice on the foundation stones -- the sacred slabs in the center of the temple's basement. Sacrifice was a common theme in the Kreeg history, which compounded the problems with negotiation. People willing to make great sacrifices for what they wanted were notoriously difficult to bring to middle ground and compromise.

Before they were even half way to the temple the gates burst in and the mob rushed for them, fists upraised weapons of sticks, clubs and rocks in their hands. Blaster fire echoed from far behind, but it

wasn't clear if it was the civil police or the rebels who possessed the weapons. Surrounding everything was a Dark pall -- evil ran rampant on the streets and Obi-Wan could feel it around them like a suffocating cloak.

The crowds surged forward. As one the separated Jedi drew and charged their sabres, bringing the stunning, shimmering blades to life. While still herding the others toward the temple they deflected projectiles and attacks, then blaster fire. Mostly untouched due to their advance skill, the Jedi sustained minor cuts and wounds. Near the forefront of the conflict, Jinn's emerald sabre, Kenobi's azure sabre flashed and sparked with glowing energy.

Then suddenly, like a black cloud passing over their bodies, a pall descended and everything changed. Phona Dar was the first Jedi to fall. Collapsing, like a puppet with cut strings, she fell to the ground, clutching her wide head. Nearly a visible, tangible thing, a Dark wave swept over Obi-Wan and sent him to his knees with agony. The suffocating evil was surrounding him and it was a struggle to breathe. The Force seemed to be slipping away in a thin stream. Blaster fire struck him in the shoulder, then in the arm and with incredible effort he tried to punch through the Darkness with his inner Light.

—

'Padawan!' The cry was like a lifeline and a distress call at once. His Master was in trouble and at the same instant crying for him to fight -- to survive. _'Fight the Darkness! We are stronger than the evil! Stay with me!_'

--

The plea shocked him back to a grounding of his power -- of Qui-Gon's power. His muscles and nerves rippled with the Force. _'I am always with you, Master.'_

--

Obi-Wan felt his Force break through the encompassing blackness. Diplomats and Jedi had fallen around him. Struggling to his feet he searched for his Master, who was valiantly deflecting blaster fire and attackers. Only seconds had passed, but enough to nearly finish off Kenobi. Fighting through the mob around him, he struggled to get to Qui-Gon. Phona Byl and Phona Dar were on the ground, motionless.

Back to back with his Master, Obi-Wan fought the evil energy encircling them as he fought the attackers. Relying on a fraction of their normal Force level, they managed to protect the representatives, and themselves well enough to reach the Temple. The members of the diplomatic party were bruised or cut, but all alive by the time they reached the sanctuary, managing to run through the small, narrow entrance before it was closed by a tall stone blockade. At the door, Qui-Gon hesitated, glancing at the bodies of Phona Byl and Phona Dar -- Master and Padawan -- side by side in death as in life.

Obi-Wan's throat closed and he choked on the grief and fear rising up within. Those emotions snagged onto the Darkness still surrounding

them and he staggered, falling against the wall, nearly overwhelmed with the Black malignancy. Qui-Gon grabbed him, pulling him into the Temple and securing the huge metal doors.

"Obi-Wan. You must be strong."

Catching his breath, he studied the earnest blue eyes capturing his. "I will, Master."

Jogging in the lead, the aide Tobi led them upstairs toward the top room of the pyramid. Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan remained in the foyer, studying the defenses and quietly discussing their next options. There was something wrong and both felt it heavily now that the initial press of battle was behind them.

Confusion clouded the strong blue eyes of the Master as he locked gazes with his Padawan, trying to discern the answer from some spark of inspiration between them. Suddenly, like a shadow passing between them and the sun, a wave of pain lanced through their connection. Gasping for breath, Qui-Gon's face twisted in pain as he collapsed to his knees.

"Master!" Obi-Wan took him in his arms and eased him to the floor.

Without asking Kenobi knew there was incredible agony coursing through Qui-Gon's body, racing through the nerves and blood like a raging river. Dragging his Master to the steps he tried to understand what was happening while he agonized over what he could do to ease the pain. A small, needle-like dart protruded from Jinn's arm.

—

'Poison.' Suffering too much to speak, the communications automatically slipped into their shared mental connection.

"What?" Without volition Kenobi pulled the dart out of Qui-Gon's arm. Heat emanated from the cut and Obi-Wan's hand twitched with reaction to a deadly toxin discoloring the skin. How could he have been hit by a dart here in the Temple? He held tighter to his Master's arms, trying to squeeze out the poison. "No!"

—

_'Going -- too -- fast. . . ' _Already Jinn was gasping for breath, eyes closed against the fiery torrent flowing inside. _'Save -- mission . . . '_

--

Surging instinctively into a deeper level of the Force he had never used, Kenobi pushed all the life-power he had into his mentor's system, driving out the poison that he could. Fear rippled through his mind, already dreading his healing powers would not help.

—

'Not enough.' Qui-Gon had easily picked up on the

desperation.

—

'What else can I do?'

'Save the mission --'

—

"No! I won't let you die!"

Beyond the fear and panic Obi-Wan intercepted a stab of inspiration -- like a shaft of light. The sacred stones. If they were mystical they might lend him more power to use his healing Force. Perhaps to even summon the supernatural possibilities of the Warrior Bond that were yet untapped. He would do anything to save his Master.

—

'Darkness -- like before -- fight it -- assassins -- mission . . .
,

—

A sob gurgled in his throat. "The mission -- " he choked off.
_'That's all you can think about when --' _he couldn't finish the thought.

—

'I -- impress -- important -- peace --' Qui-Gon's eyes opened, for an instant clear, tender and heartbreakingly sympathetic. _'You already know - much -- great Jedi -- you will always know -- my love -- my son -- for you --'_

--

Feeling the twinge of pain through their link, Obi-Wan could no longer fight back the tears. _'Yes.'_

--

'The mission -- important -- you -- most -- important legacy -- my --' Struggling, he brought up the hilt of his lightsabre and kissed the tip. Slowly, painfully, he took Obi-Wan's trembling hand and placed it on the hilt. Kenobi's tears seeped onto the joined hands and the metal of the sabre's handle. _' -- my Padaw . . . '_

--

"No -- don't leave"

Qui-Gon slipped farther away, sliding inexorably into a near-death like state of trance. There was not enough Force left in the valiant Master, and Obi-Wan knew the only way to save his mentor was his own Force.

In the back of his mind he felt the warning signs of danger

approaching. Mingled with the Dark power and the peril there was a sliver of Light and hope. How? From where? Burying the grief as deep as possible he honed in on the trail of Light. Quickly he carried his Master's limp form down into the lowest levels of the Temple. Running on desperate instinct he let the Force guide him. When he reached the bottom he could feel the emanating, resonating hum of spiritual might generating from the stones. In the center of the square of blocked stone it seemed to glow.

This natural/supernatural energy could save Jinn, he knew. But it would not be enough. Studying the walls he remembered vague teachings about the sacred stones. Sacrificial stones. In that moment of clarity and distinction he knew what he had to do.

Gently he placed his Master in the middle of the square. They were directly under the center point of the pyramid. Pressing the sabre hilt against his Master's chest he bent low and kissed the hilt, sealing his own testimony of valor -- along with his Master's -- that he would not, could not fail in this.

Wrapping Jinn's cloak around the prone Jedi, Obi-Wan pressed his hands to his mentor's chest, directing all the power he possessed into the healing trance. Feeling the energy course through and sustain his Master's faltering systems -- each vital organ, each element of his being -- as the Force diluted the poison and reached a suspended level of existence. The body temperature dropped, the heartbeat slowed to nearly nothing, the breaths all but stopped. Obi-Wan's life Force faded.

The tickle of peril still niggled at the back of his thoughts. His Master was not yet safe. Assassins -- Jedi assassins. Like they had faced in space on the Toneer mission. [Jedi Warrior Bond #2] Someone had killed the other Master and apprentice. Had nearly killed he and Qui-Gon. Would they stop now or come after him? He vowed he would not let the Dark powers claim his Master.

Barely strong enough to stand, he pushed himself off his knees and staggered up the long staircase, up several flights. Above him the fighting continued. This was more than a civil dispute -- he could hear blasters echoing against the stone walls, cries of pain and death filtering through the ancient monument. Glancing back, he could no longer see the body in the dark center. But the invaders could come here and discover the fallen, vulnerable Master and Obi-Wan would not allow that.

Standing near the door adjoining the main level, he could feel the presence of evil on the other side. Not just of violence and hate, but a Dark Force pressing to reach him. Whoever had killed Phona Byl and Phona Dar and poisoned his Master was on the other side of the door. Allowing the riot to mask the true intent, the assassin had struck, a wolf among the sheep, delivering the fatal -- possibly fatal blows -- while Jinn fought to save those in his care.

Opening the door would bring him face to face with the assassin. In his condition there would be no hope to exact revenge. Nor could he be sure of defeating the enemy and keeping him from another strike at Qui-Gon. Neither could he stop the mob from attacking the helpless Jedi. Centering on an inner peace that was fleeting, he focused on the most important element in his heart.

—
'Be mindful of the moment, my Padawan.'

—
Had he dreamed it? Such a typical quote he'd heard so many times. Was it Qui-Gon's last whisper of guidance? Activating his lightsabre Kenobi melted the stone crevice of the entranceway. It would take a long time and a great deal of work to blast through this. More than any casual rioter would be willing to invest. By the time anyone could come through here would the danger be past? A shiver shot through him and he felt the cold stab of Darkness from the other side. No, whoever was after them wanted them dead. The hazard might not go away easily. Methodically he sealed the separation until only solid, molten rock remained.

There was very little left within him. As a final gesture he sent an image of dullness around his Master. Anyone looking casually there would see nothing, would feel nullness, not the form of a helpless Jedi. It was a student's trick an easily learned entertainment back at the Temple. Today it would save a valued life. Settling back on a lower step he cornered himself into a shadow. Gradually he placed himself into a light trance. When the door was opened he would spring to instant alertness to fight if necessary, to summon help if the danger was past.

Shaking with exertion, emotion and fatigue, he collapsed against the wall. Should he go back down to the bottom level and transfer the last of his Force to his Master? Now there was not enough energy Force left for him to make the trip. As if his soul -- his entire being -- was slipping out of his body, he felt the escalation of the healing process. The sacred stones, or perhaps the Warrior Bond, was draining him of his life Force Jinn would be saved, and now there was nothing Obi-Wan could do to stop it. If he could. If he would. Which he would not.

Closing his eyes he focused, not allowing, but freely sending all the strength he could back to his Master. Along with that energy he passed along a final thought.

—
'Live, my Master. I shall see you again. With my last breath it is my honor to serve you. Always.'

—

Before rising to full consciousness, Qui-Gon's mind slowly surfaced to a level of cognizance. Body aching, he knew he had been in the throes of pain -- death -- poison. And he was now emerging from the remnant aches of a healing trance. Every fiber of his being, inside and out rang with the agony of death-wracked hurt. Step by anguished step he climbed from a tomb of empty mental blackness -- nullness -- into semi-consciousness.

Lying on a cold slab he breathed in musty, old air. Silence and darkness were tangible enough to be felt. Hands on his chest, he

gripped the cold, reassuring metal of his sabre hilt. In the corners of his mind he felt warmth, a memory of whispered thoughts still echoed in his senses. The voice, the essence of his Padawan.

Reaching out with the Force he was startled to realize that was all he could feel. No vibrant signature of Obi-Wan nearby. Normally when he was injured or sick his Padawan never left his side. Why was his faithful apprentice absent now? Judging from the way he felt, the lack of strength and the hunger in his stomach, he guessed that a few days had passed. Not unusual for a healing trance.

Opening his eyes he assessed the darkness and felt the remnant tingle of a Force imprint. Someone, presumably Obi-Wan, had used the Force to effect some kind of cloak. The power had all but dissipated, but knowing his Padawan's mind and trademark essence so well he did not doubt what happened.

As he struggled to sit up his mind started clicking into gear, automatically deducing events. He remembered they were under attack from a mob and came into the sanctuary for protection. Obi-Wan must have brought him here, offering a last defense with the cloaking field. Then what?

Undoubtedly his Padawan had left to protect the others. Rightly so. At once Jinn felt both proud and disappointed in his young charge. Pleased that the young man had acted as a proper Jedi and seen to his responsibilities, he felt the slightest bit let down that his apprentice had left him alone to die. Now remembering, he had kissed his sabre and tried to pass it on to his Padawan, a symbolic, even fanciful gesture of his legacy from Master to Padawan. And he chided Obi-Wan about the romantic notions of the Warrior Bond? He would have to bite his tongue next time he was so tempted to tease his Padawan.

So why hadn't Obi-Wan taken the lightsabre? Because he did not believe Jinn would die, came the reasonable and obvious answer. Cautiously coming to his knees, seeing that all muscles and bones seemed to be working properly, he knew he was being utterly childish. He should expect his Padawan to obey him, not question his commands. But typical of the headstrong Kenobi, the Padawan had left, confident his Master would recover. Justifying the desertion, he felt better, but still a slight bit miffed that Obi-Wan had left him in this basement for days.

Walking with slow, tedious steps, he was ascending up the third stairwell when he realized the uncharacteristically selfish thoughts were probably part of the illness and healing topor. Already he was feeling better, a little more stable, and logical. Of course he hoped Obi-Wan had done some good and

Qui-Gon leaned against the cold wall of the stairwell. Faint, elusive wisps of memory returned. The impassioned, anguished cries of his Padawan. The certainty that he would die and the refusal of his student to accept the death. He remembered the Force -- Obi-Wan's distinct Force -- feeding into him with enormous pressure. The Warrior Bond? Twitching with recollection, Qui-Gon remembered their connection in the courtyard when the Darkness engulfed the four Jedi. When Phona Byl and Phona Dar died. And Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan connected through their deep bond -- and lived.

Then Jinn had been struck down by a poison dart. How had his Padawan saved his life? That memory also returned, but like a misty dream more than a remembrance. Obi-Wan had not left, but had surrendered to him everything.

—

'With my last breath it is my honor to serve you. Always.'

—

In the faintest murmur inside his mind he heard the whisper. His apprentice was still with him. Was it a memory or a connection -- the continued evidence of their supernatural link?

Clearing his mind, he reached out to find Obi-Wan in the here and now, not in his memory. There was no responding answer to his call. Concerned, tired, Jinn sat on a step and concentrated, meditated on establishing their link. Over the past several years it was nearly second nature to snap into each other's thoughts. Even when there was some distance -- a planet between them -- they could communicate through their thoughts. And always -- always -- even in sleep or great distances (although they had never been separated for long or for far in the four years they had known each other), there was a reassuring warmth in his brain, in his consciousness, in his heart, that told him Obi-Wan was with him. Right now he could feel nothing but the whispered reminiscence.

Stumbling up the dark staircase he saw a jagged hole above him -- the doorway to the ground level. Several steps before the blasted breach he felt a tingle of dread. Stopping, he examined the steps in the partial light. Dark stains.

Swallowing hard he trudged up the last few steps, into the light, coughing with revulsion that the red Humanoid blood of his apprentice marked the path. There had been an angry battle here. Smears of green -- alien blood -- blotched the sanctuary's floor. The red smears ended at the door.

Hovering an open palm over the stone he trembled. Obi-Wan's blood. In the corner, in the deepest shadow of the step he felt something was there. Sensing what it was he extended his hand and summoned his Padawan's sabre hilt. The energy core was dead. A shiver of fear lanced through him. Obi-Wan was in danger. He could feel no Force signature, could not understand the deafening psionic silence, but he knew his Padawan was in perilous danger and needed his help.

Gazing outside, he saw the three suns of Kreeg were low on the horizon. The end of the day. The diplomatic housing and grounds were mostly tidy. There were signs of damage and violence but also signs that there was a clean-up effort. He glanced back at the floor of the pyramid. Why hadn't they cleaned up their sacred building? Crouching down he touched the red smear nearest him. It singed his finger with traumatic sensations of pain and fear -- Obi-Wan's emotions. It also told him the blood was dry and old.

Carefully walking through the deserted square he kept his hand on his lightsabre. Someone, coming toward him, turned the corner ahead, and Qui-Gon stopped.

Kelnor, the old servant, fell to his knees upon seeing the Jedi.

"A ghost! Help, the Jedi ghost!"

Startled, annoyed, Qui-Gon flexed his sore muscles, assured he was not a spirit. Then he cautiously approached the man. "I am not a ghost, I am alive. Where is my Padawan?"

Kelnor could hardly speak. Stuttering, he remained on his knees. "No, spare me, please, don't kill me."

"I won't kill you!" Now he was losing patience and didn't particularly care. It was harder to fight the dread rising in his tight chest. "Where is the other Jedi?"

"All died in the fight. Two the first day -- as you -- as we thought you had died."

"My Padawan!"

The old man jumped at the shout. "This evening when they finally opened the bottom chamber to the sacred stones, only then did they find the body."

"No." Jinn denied the awful, fearful statement in a desperate whisper.

Continuing, the old man finished his report. "They are burning the body --"

Nerveless arms dangled at his side and Qui-Gon could feel his legs shake in delayed shock. Had he known this all along and denied the obvious? No signature warmth in his thoughts, no sense of his Padawan left -- the blood --

"No!" Barely containing his rage and grief he clenched his teeth. "No -- I would know . . ."

"They were looking for you. Destroy the ones who would take Kreeg away from them -- that's what they said -- their shout. Republic troops are arriving today but it is too late."

Rubbing his face with trembling hands Jinn stepped back, making an unsteady course toward the Senate building. He had to find someone in authority. Why would they burn the body of a Jedi? Everyone in the Republic knew the Jedi custom was to burn their honored dead on a pyre, usually performed by other Jedi. Why rush to destroy the body? Unless the body still lived? -- came the answer with a thrill of horror.

Pushing aside the panic he followed the guidance of the Force. Concentrating, as if his friend's life depended on this, he sifted through the senses filtering through his mind. The whisper of his Padawan's voice was still there. If it was a remnant memory of their Bond then it was as if Obi-Wan was talking to him. But there was something wrong -- something in the way -- a Darkness --

Jinn's eyes snapped open. The edge of Darkness from Toner. The Darkness from the attack when two Jedi died and he was poisoned. The

dampening evil that muffled his Padawan's life Force! With a shivering heat he felt Obi-Wan's Force in a pin-prick of Light. Obi-Wan was alive!

'Obi-Wan! Padawan!'

Racing through the courtyard, Jinn followed the Force to the legendary gardens of Kreeg. A small diplomatic gathering huddled around a slab where stretched a body, draped in a Jedi robe. The Malastare assistant held a blaster in her hand.

Jinn stared in shock. Destroy the body by incinerating it with a blaster? Common practice in many parts of the galaxy, it was irreverent and crude to think of disintegration of a Jedi's remains in such a manner. Insulted, resentful, emotionally distraught, Jinn's anger rose.

There was no time to mentally debate the moral wrong of his hatred, of giving in to the Dark passions. There was only the chance to save his Padawan. In that instant a flash of the Force confirmed what he knew in his heart -- he knew with absolute certainty his apprentice was not dead at all. The Malastare raised the blaster.

"NO!"

Another flash. The malice, the deadly intent and Dark power burst from her like black fire. She was the one who wanted them dead. Blinking against the nearly tangible image, he saw she was the one who had found Obi-Wan on the stairs for the sanctuary and shot him -- leaving him for dead. There was no time to understand what kept his apprentice alive, but he knew there was only a breaths instant to save him.

In that moment the Malastare recognized the knowledge and turned the blaster on Jinn. Before she aimed he had his sabre up and activated, deflecting the bolts she shot at him. Defense was quick and ruthless. There would be no mercy for this creature. Diverting the blasts while he approached, he quickly flipped the blaster from her hand and backed her against one of the garden walls. The tip of the blade at her throat he glared at her, allowing her to easily feel his threat, and yes, his hatred.

"Why did you want to kills us?"

Her face reflected the terror over his certainty.

"You killed two Jedi, poisoned me and tried to kill my Padawan. Why? Who is behind this? Your government? Why do they want to kill Jedi?"

"You will know only too late, Jedi."

The hissed words spat out. Then she fell forward, her throat impaling on the lightsabre, dissecting her thin neck. Before the body fell to the ground she was dead.

Not wasting a second, Qui-Gon spun around and swept of the cloak from the still figure on the slab, touching the lacerated face of his apprentice. Cold to the touch, pallored gray, Obi-Wan looked dead.

Taking a breath, Jinn held his palm over the boy's chest. There was no discernable beat, but there was no vacuum, no absence of the Force. Something still stirred within the body and Jinn knew it to be a healing trance -- one so deep he could not detect it. Or was it the deepest possible link between them -- the Warrior Bond responding -- rejecting death for both of them? If not, then how did he know with certainty Obi-Wan yet lived? The Warrior Bond. It was the only answer. The only thing that had saved his life. Could it be the only thing left to save Obi-Wan?

Taking his Padawan in his arms he carried the limp form through the maze and back to the Temple. Skipping down the old stone steps he returned to the well of the sanctuary, to the sacred stones. Laying down his burden he pressed his hands on the silent chest, ignoring the blast marks, the blood on the clothing. Clearing his mind he entered into a trance, calling for his Padawan.

He could feel no power, no stirring of energy from the stones or the temple. He had felt it for himself _'No,'_ he cried inside. Whatever sacred power had existed here was gone. Had his Padawan summoned it for his healing, leaving nothing for himself? No, Jinn could not accept that sacrifice. They would, after all, have to rely entirely on the Warrior Bond. It was deep enough, strong enough -- it would have to be.

—

'I have come for you, Obi-Wan. Your healing state is too deep. Come to me and I will help you. As you helped me. Answer me, my Padawan.'

—

Less than a whisper and more than silence stirred within his mind, or heart, or nerves. The Force -- Obi-Wan's Force -- responded.

—

'Come to me, Obi-Wan.'

'Master?'

—

Warmth engulfed the older Jedi, stilling the ragged heartbeat and trickling fear. _'My Padawan.'_

—

'You are alive, Master?'

'Yes. You saved me. As I must now save you through our bond.'

'The Warrior Bond. It needed a sacrifice. Needed sanctuary.'

—

In side his mind Jinn wept. _'Our Bond is our sanctuary. Never again must you offer yourself as a sacrifice, please, my

Padawan.'__

—

'Sometimes a Jedi must sacrifice to save others.'

'Never again for me, Obi-Wan.'

'I can not make that promise, my Master.'

—

The mutual grief flashed between them. There was nothing they would not do to protect the other. Perilous, honored oaths of guardianship were exchanged. __'We may never be able to do this again. Please be careful in the future.'__

— —

A smile lit the somberness. __'As you wish, Master. If you will promise the same.'__

—

'You are a cheeky apprentice.'

'So you say.'

—

Sobering, Jinn's hands trembled along with his thoughts. __'We must bring you out of this trance, my Padawan. You must come out of these dangerous depths. I will be with you.'__

—

'Always, Master?'

'Always.'

—

Tedious, painful hours slid by in the darkest reaches of the sanctuary. Gradually Qui-Gon's worn, battered, drained spirit and body manipulated the Force, using it to draw his Padawan back to life. So near death was Kenobi that the process reached into the very depths of his being. Mingled so thoroughly, there seemed no separation between Master and Padawan.

Exhausted, but satisfied Obi-Wan was stable, would live, Qui-Gon gently broke the connection. Collapsing on the cold floor of the temple, still sensitive to his apprentice's Force, he could feel the pain and fatigue from his pupil as easily as he could feel his own damage. No longer well insulated by the Force, they would have to recover more slowly and normally.

Kenobi would remain in a light healing sleep for another day or two, and could now recover on his own. Jinn decided he would need simple sleep -- and a lot of it -- but no more extraordinary measures. No more of his Padawan draining his life Force. Placing a hand on his

apprentice's chest, Jinn slipped into a light slumber. He would rest for a few moments before carrying his Padawan back to their quarters where Obi-Wan could recover more comfortably.

Gazing out the window, studying the mysterious pyramid sanctuary on the other side of the compound, Jinn marveled at the amazing events of the last several days. On a professional level it had been unpleasant and disturbing. Riots, murder and Dark conspiracies didn't happen -- even to Jedi -- every day. On a personal level it had been horrifying. Two Jedi murdered. He and Obi-Wan narrowly escaping the same fate. Knowing the anguish of nearly losing his Padawan. Knowing his greatest ally -- his son -- would sacrifice himself for Jinn's safety was awesome and terrible. Discovering the hidden depths of their Warrior Bond -- incredible, humbling and frightening.

From their mental link he knew Obi-Wan was stirring in the other room. He would give him time to adjust to life among the living. If he required anything that would also be clear over their connection. Now, immediately after the intense crisis, their link was strongest. Over time -- days, months, years -- it would thin or increase depending on the danger they faced. In the initial aftermath of crisis he always felt the need to shelter and hold his apprentice, as if the physical contact could ward off danger or keep Obi-Wan safer. Sixteen year olds did not particularly like being hugged or fussed over by father-figures, but when one or both of them had nearly died, both of them required the closeness. Proudly he considered what a fine young man his Padawan had become and his insides twisted to think that the galaxy seemed an increasingly perilous place for one so noble and that he could not protect his pupil forever.

Startled to find he was pacing, he forced himself to clam down, to sit and relax. It would not do for his Padawan to see him in an agitated state, although certainly Obi-Wan already sensed it through their unifying link. Jinn wondered if they could ever again reach the incredible depth achieved this time to save each other's lives. He hoped they would never have to find out. Somewhere, though, was a dormant, quiet anxiety that one day even their Bond would not be enough to save one of them. Closing his eyes and mind to that terror, he leaned his head in a hand to still his trembling.

"Master."

Qui-Gon stood and approached his unsteady apprentice, helping the boy to a sun-drenched seat by the window.

"You seem to be much stronger, my Padawan."

"Tired." A faint grin twitched at his lips, in his mind. "And starved. I will even eat pinoi nuts if I have to."

A deep laugh, of relief, of happiness, rumbled from the broad, older Jedi. "I don't think that will be necessary. Our faithful retainer is anxious to be of service. I will inform him of your needs." Leaning close, Jinn made no effort to move. Obi-Wan had returned to consciousness several times in the last few days, but never so alert, never leaving his room, never complaining about hunger. Heartened at the improvement, Jinn still found it hard to shut away all his

anxiety. "Do you want to eat here?"

"Yes, I'm happy to be out of bed."

Jinn crossed to a communications grid and notified their servant that they were ready for some Kreeg soup, bread, sweet muffins and herb tea. Nothing too heavy, he decided, for the recovering youth, but enough to encourage the usually hungry young man to rediscover his appetite. So far the lingering affects of the ordeal had left Kenobi too distracted to eat or sleep well. Qui-Gon sat down next to his apprentice and subtly watched him.

Through their link Obi-Wan had impressions of everything that happened. During his lucid moments he asked a few questions, clarified a few memories, but was mostly subdued. Jinn knew, in time, that would change and soon he would be back to his old, youthful enthusiasm and sarcasm, but it would not be soon enough for the worried mentor. Never again did he want to face that kind of fright.

"Have you discovered anything about the Malastares?"

"No. Senate investigators have taken over that line of inquiry." Qui-Gon wished to be on the forefront of investigating the attacks and conspiracies against them, but chose the more important work of supporting his Padawan. The aide was endowed with the Dark Force, no question, but as to her history or motives -- those are still mysteries."

Obi-Wan struggled for mature detachment and failed as he studied some point out the window. "What did Master Yoda think about the Darkness we felt?"

"He senses the imbalance and believes this edge of Darkness that we have encountered --"

"Twice," Obi-Wan reminded.

"Yes, twice, is most disturbing. I am sure it caused the death of Phona Byl and Padawan Phona Dar."

The apprentice gazed out at the gardens. He released a soul-deep sigh. "I couldn't help them. I couldn't save them. Will the Council think I failed?"

"If so then I have failed too." Gently, he reassured, "There was nothing we could do against that Dark power, Obi-Wan."

The youth shivered. "I don't want to ever feel that numbing evil again."

"Nor do I." His throat was tight and dry.

Impulsively, Qui-Gon hugged him close, pressing him to his heart. Obi-Wan held onto one of his Master's arms, like a little child again, sheltered in the protective hold of his paladin.

Watching, sensing Byl and Dar die had been upsetting and painful. But the thought of losing his apprentice -- that pain ripped him apart to his roots. Again he thanked his stars he did not have Yoda's gift of

prognostication. He did not want to know their detailed future -- the dangers, the injuries, the heartbreaks -- how it would end between them. Perhaps he did not have the strength of Force to deal with the knowledge. Perhaps he had too much sensitivity for his apprentice, who was as much a part of him as his blood, his heart, his soul

"Have the investigators discovered why the Malastare aides wanted to kill us?"

"Nothing conclusive. Officially the Malastares have denied the attempt. Negotiations have broken off. For now Kreeg will remain in dispute, but the Senate has sent a committee to look into another planet to colonize." Sensing he had only part of his apprentice's attention Jinn stopped. "Whatever happens it will not concern us. We need time to recover."

Against his chest Kenobi nodded. "I have never seen another Jedi killed." It was a forlorn whisper. "I have never been so afraid." His voice caught. Qui-Gon held him even tighter. "I thought I would lose you."

There were so many things he could say, or not say. So many empty vows and assurances. Jinn chose what was uppermost in his heart. "But you saved me. For that I thank you, my Padawan. It means I will have many more years with you." In his arms the young man shook and Jinn leaned his head on the sandy colored hair. "We will mourn the loss of our fellow Jedi. We will not be afraid of the future."

Nodding, Obi-Wan calmed. "They don't want us back at the Temple, do they?"

Puzzled at the odd question, Jinn tried to discern the motive. "No. You sound wary." He tried to lighten the mood. "Have I infected you with my resistance to authority?"

The tone was lighter, but not by much. "Perhaps. I am a diligent student, am I not, Master?"

"I won't even answer that saucy remark, Padawan." Sobering, he asked again at his apprentice's reluctance. "Why do you worry about returning?"

"I am troubled about what they will do. The Warrior Bond is incredible and scary. And powerful. I would not want them to -- to think it too -- extreme."

Beyond the words, Qui-Gon easily picked up the anxiety emanating from his pupil. The staid, traditional Jedi Council would probably not understand the link shared by Jinn and Kenobi. They would be leery of a Master and Padawan so ready to sacrifice for each other. Perhaps it would be best to keep this to themselves for now.

"It will be our secret, my Padawan. For now. You know my policy about the Council."

Looking up at his Master, Kenobi's green eyes glittered with amusement. "You don't want them interfering with your life. And what they don't know won't hurt them?"

"You are too cheeky, my young friend." The smile diminished the rebuke. "They do not need to know everything about our lives."

—

_'Sanctuary.' _Obi-Wan blinked as the lucid thought bounced between them. _'We have found our sanctuary. Against the rest of the galaxy. Sanctuary.'_

--

The definition tingled in Jinn's mind and very center. "Yes, my Padawan." Against every threat and evil in the galaxy there was a refuge for them. _'We have discovered a sanctuary.'_

--

A knock at the door announced the arrival of their food. Qui-Gon stood -- the picture of the aloof and coolly contained Master Jedi. Obi-Wan ran fingers through his hair and sat straight, presenting an image remotely resembling his Master's. Pleased admiration echoed in Jinn's blue eyes as he called for the servant to enter. No one would ever read the undercurrent link he shared with his Padawan. In these dangerous times it was a valued haven of strength, and a reserve of safety for them both. _ _

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END OF PART THREE

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End
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